

## The AMBER Plan

The Commission has a new Emergency Alert System (EAS) “event code.” Broadcast stations and cable systems may use this code to activate AMBER Plans to alert the public about child abduction cases.

### Background

The AMBER Plan is named for a 9-year-old girl who, in 1996, was kidnapped by a stranger and later found dead. In response to that tragedy, local radio stations in the area of her disappearance agreed to repeat news bulletins about abducted children, hoping the bulletins might help save the life of a child.

The name now stands for **A**merica’s **M**issing: **B**roadcast **E**mergency **R**esponse.

### It Works Like This

The AMBER Plan is a voluntary partnership between, among others, law enforcement agencies and the media. Once police officials have confirmed a missing child report, an AMBER Alert is sent to area radio stations, television stations, and cable companies. Broadcasters interrupt programming to relay the information using the EAS, voluntarily delivering the information to the community – the same concept used during severe weather or other emergencies that threaten life or property. A description of the abducted child, suspected abductor, and details of the abduction are broadcast to millions of listeners and viewers. (The alert is read after a distinctive sound tone and the statement: “This is an AMBER Alert.”) The alert also provides information about how members of the public who have information relating to the abduction may contact the police or other appropriate law enforcement agency.

The goal of the AMBER Plan is to galvanize an entire community, adding millions of extra eyes and ears to watch, listen, and help in the safe return of the child and apprehension of the suspect.

While the EAS is typically used to notify the public about severe weather and other natural and man-made emergencies, it is also the warning system for civil and national emergencies. In order to prevent the overuse of the EAS system, all of the following criteria must usually be met to activate the EAS for an AMBER Alert:

- The child must be 15 years of age or younger, or have a proven mental or physical disability;
- Law enforcement must confirm the child has been abducted;



- Law enforcement must believe the circumstances surrounding the abduction indicate that the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death; and
- There must be enough descriptive information about the child, abductor, and/or suspect's vehicle to believe an immediate broadcast alert will help.

On April 30, 2003, President Bush signed the Protect Act of 2003, which established a national AMBER Alert system for coordinating state and local AMBER plans. The Act directs the Department of Justice to appoint a national AMBER Alert coordinator who will work with broadcasters and law enforcement agencies to ensure that the state and local AMBER plans are consistent. The Act also provides funding for states to support AMBER Alert systems and plans, including funding for electronic signs along highways for AMBER Alert messages.

### **What You Can Do**

If you see a child, adult, or vehicle fitting the AMBER Alert description, immediately call the telephone number given in the AMBER Alert and provide authorities with as much information as possible.

### **Remember**

AMBER Alerts are only used for the most serious child abduction cases, where the police believe the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death, not for runaways or most parental abductions.

For additional information on the AMBER Plan, visit the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) Web site, [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com).

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